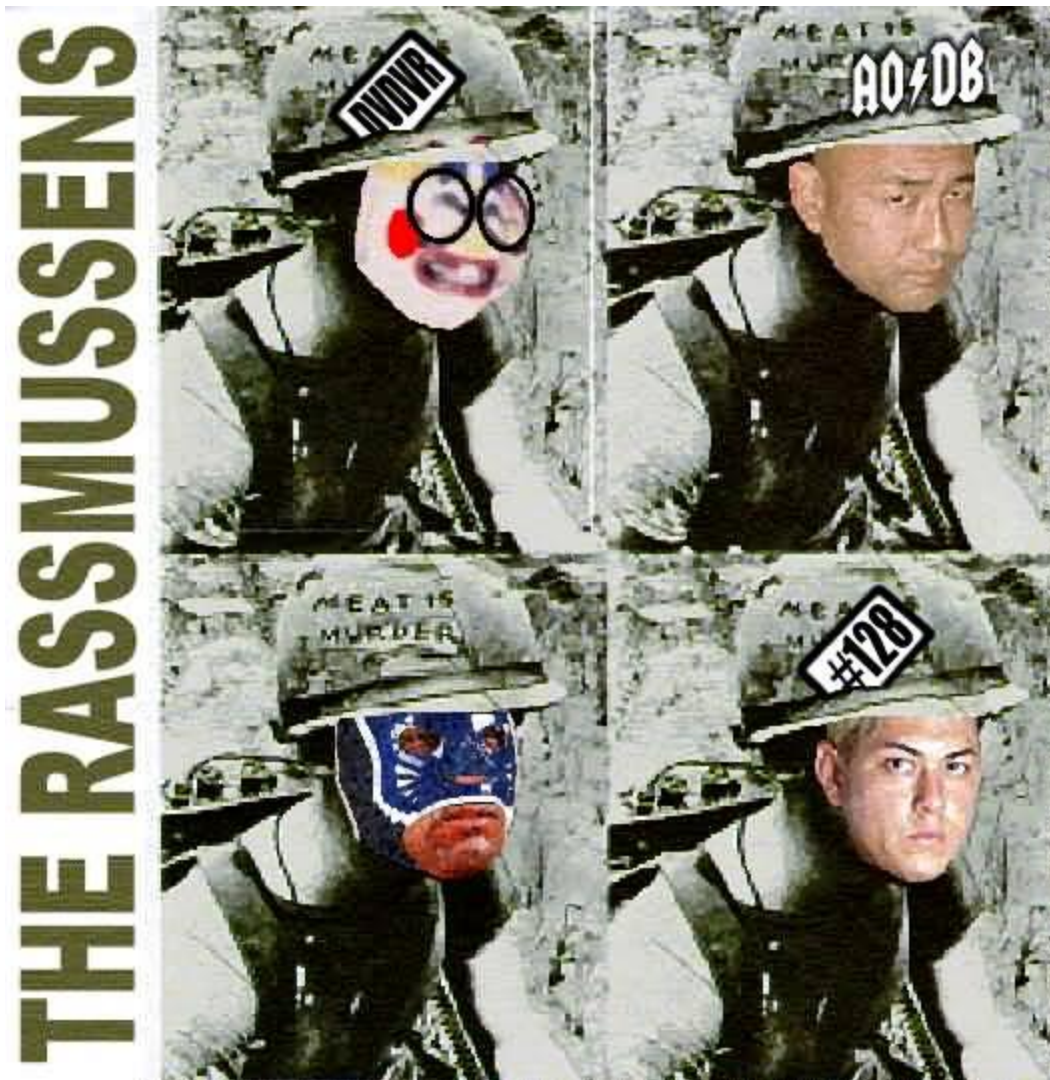




The cover for this beloved DVDVR is by the KING OF ALL BRITISH WRESTLING ARTISTS, young LINUS!

- as the manipulation of British pop album covers continues. HUZZAH!

PERRO AGUYO! and UNIVERSO 2000! are shockingly watchable! MURAKAMI! AND ISHIKAWA! continue to try and kill each other dead! TOM HOWARD! is no longer Russian! The FUNKS! RICK FULLER! EL SIGNO! and some other stuff we managed to watch during the fallout from the DVD 500!

Hiya!

Welcome to the Death Valley Driver Video Review #128!

[The cover for this beloved DVDVR is by the KING OF ALL BRITISH WRESTLING ARTISTS, young LINUS!- as the manipulation of British pop album covers continues. HUZZAH!]

We are hated but we still bring the love for the 128th time. (Actually - it is probably closer to around 276 but Dean is a fool). DVD 500 is quite the best of times, worst of times for us. We get all defensive and argumentative with each other - yet, we blow through more tapes now than at any other point of time. Four of us even managed to review some shit. We are still way off kilter which makes this issue some sort of collector's item (EBAY!!! DADDY!!!! We will be worth more than Road Dogg!!!!) Just wait to you see what Dean has cooked up. But First is First and we start with the PHAT one..... TONY!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

@#@#@#@#@ Best of Mid-Atlantic 1982
by Anthony Gancarski

[Note: I'm working through a weird sort of writer's block as I write this, and am doing the writeups as I feel them, and not in sequential order with regards to the order on the tape or the actual chronology of Mid-Atlantic. I'd also like to thank those of you who have bought my book, or who have even checked out the samples at www.diversityincorporated.com. I invite those of you unfamiliar with my work outside the DVDVR to visit the site.]

Dory Funk, Jr vs. Jay Youngblood

I was describing this match to tomk in IRC the other night, and he was as amazed as I had been while watching this - a good Jay Youngblood singles match. And it was, indeed, though it was very much a typical Dory Funk match, with credible matwork and offense long on logic and short on high-impact bumps. One of a few matches on the tape that combines a verifiable legend with a somewhat more marginal worker, with the idea being that the legend will make the match credible. Worked in this case.

LeRoy Brown vs. Ricky Steamboat:

This was as bad as you would expect. Arena footage, which leads us to Brown taking a lot of time to stall outside the ring, lumbering amidst the ringsiders. Brown's offense is lethargic in the manner of a DC Postal worker at the end of a hard day's graft; all somnambulistic strikes. This was a "back-n-forth" encounter, so Steamboat got a lot of opportunities for offense; Brown's immobility reduced Steamboat to intermittent knife-edge shots, as it was clear that Brown was incapable of going on Steamer's level and that Steamboat hadn't learned exactly how to play to the strengths of a big man.

Jack Brisco vs. Roddy Piper:

I'm not a Piper fan. His ringwork over the years never captivated me, even when his promos were great before he started believing his own hype. His theatricality is exaggerated in a way that sacrifices the credibility of better work elsewhere on the card. This match is right in the middle of Brisco's face push in Mid-Atlantic, and it works for all the reasons you would hope. The bizarre spectacle of Brisco leading Piper through a mat sequence is cool in and of itself, especially when the work hits that freestyle fever pitch that is damned close to a little shoot interchange in the middle of the match, where the workers are breathless and spent trying to get advantage. In one of these exchanges, Piper actually has advantage at the end, and his laugh

of triumph - for getting over, ever so slightly, on one of the best wrestlers of the last 30 years - is realer than anything Piper's done since he went to Titan a couple of years after this.

Slaughter/Kernodle vs. Youngblood/Steamboat:

This one here is all heels, as it should be. Slaughter and Kernodle work as tight as my household budget, laying in shots and getting buck wild with the suplexes and logically impeccable heel doubleteams. In watching this match, I can't help but think that this is what current US heavyweights should be but aren't, but possibly couldn't if they wanted to. Slaughter, like fellow M-A heel Ivan Koloff, takes solid bumps that actually lead to the next place in the match, rather than providing impetus to slackjaws, fools, and rubes to chant 'Holy ECW Shit Hardcore' or some permutation thereof. Kernodle strikes like Kawada here, laying in punches that look like actual punches, working holds that actually hurt, and it occurs to me for not the first or the final time how much the art of US wrestling has deteriorated since it became so goddamn entertaining.

Dory Funk, Jr. vs. Jack Brisco:

Everyone reading this knows the weight I ascribe to a certain 1975 Japanese match between these two for the NWA title. In some ways, this match where Funk challenges for Brisco's Mid-Atlantic Belt is better than that. An occasional overreliance on mirroring in the 'feeling-out' and early matwork stages of the 1975 match gives way here to a more diverse assortment of control and submission holds, especially from Funk who controlled the majority of the match. The patience that a Japanese crowd had in 1975 for these two to go Broadway was not present at this arena show, however. The rubes murmured and failed to react to even the flashiest of mat stuff, which compelled Funk and Brisco to run the ropes and hit shoulderblocks and stuff that I honestly feel is beneath them. Weaver and his partner on commentary - I believe it was Caudle, but the sound was a bit muddy - often poormouthed the action, referring to Funk's "methodical" style, as if that's a valid gripe in a promotion where Jimmy Valiant and LeRoy Brown have pushes. Paul Jones shows up at ringside and roughs up Brisco when he's outside the ring, predictably causing the title change. Why Mid-Atlantic felt the need to saddle Funk with Humperdink, Jones, and the like instead of letting his work get over on its considerable merits is mysterious to me.

Jos LeDuc vs. Dick Slater:

Mid-Atlantic favored impromptu studio matches in which an aggrieved face challenger would take the measure of a heel champion; this was one of them. The match starts off with LeDuc laying in some incredibly stiff forearm shivers. It almost seems as if LeDuc wants Slater to come back at him hard, but Slater's response seemed to be to work looser. The match slowed to a crawl when LeDuc went to the control holds, most notably two applications of a standing front chancery, which neither LeDuc nor Slater sold as actually being painful. The tide turned, as they say, and Slater came back with a pussified Harley Race falling headbutt, a more credible sequence of suplexes and a top rope dive that was the first thing to suggest Slater working at his peak. Perhaps the best thing about this match was Greg Valentine schooling Bob Caudle after the latter erroneously said that the match featured no wrestling; Valentine spent a couple of minutes focusing on the most minute movements of both wrestlers, and in the process he called

better play by play than anyone Mid-Atlantic ever employed to do so besides the itinerant Solie. Screwjob finish, Slater retains.

Jimmy Valiant vs. Great Kabuki:

Exactly what you would've expected, as Mid-Atlantic openly panders to the rubes.

LeDuc vs. Slater, Redux:

Some time had elapsed between the first match and this one, as LeDuc was defending the TV title here against Slater. The story was that Slater was the aggressor here, so he got to carry more of the offense in this match early on. The style clash evident in the first match still exists, and it's hard for me to imagine why this program was booked; it plays to neither worker's strength. Slater's blown "impact" spot in this match is a top rope kneedrop; he lands on his feet, then drops to his knees as if curtsying.

Piper vs. Brisco:

Again, a rematch here. More brawling, work that is at once intense and natural, with Brisco letting Piper pop the crowd as he holds the match together. A bit less matstuff here, with the effect being reminiscent at times of Flair's mid-90s Worldwide matches. If I had to guess, given the emergence of Valiant and Gang and the gradual removal of emphasis from the 70s style workers, the older pros were instructed to turn it up a notch, as they say, moving away from mat stuff toward brawling not dissimilar to the sort we see now in WWF main events. A couple of years would pass, and there would be more Boogie Man and Paul Jones' Army and a thousand other desperate crowd-killing, credibility-squashing crap. A shame.

~!~

^ _ ^ _ ^ _ ^ _ ^ _ ^ BATTIARTS - NEVER DIE COMMERCIAL TAPE- 11/26/2000
by DEAN RASMUSSEN

The fabulous Scott Mailman gave me this to me a while ago and I have no idea why it has taken me this long to watch it- since it's freakin BattlARTS and all.

Rastaman vs. Carl Malenko:

Carl Malenko fucking rules. This match sucks but it sucks a lot less than it should because Carl Malekno fucking rules. Rastaman does a nice kneedrop on the inside of Malenko's knee. Actually, if Rastaman sold better and threw punches that looked credible in BattlARTS, I'd actually kinda dig him. He will bump and does a nice Dragon Screw. They clip clip clip clip clip to the Double Leg Fujiwara Armbar before I could find other redeeming qualities in the young man.

Ryuji Hijikata vs. Junji.com:

Junji.com keeps looking better betwixt the editz - as he punches Hijikata right in the face a bunch. Hijikata powers out of the Triangle Hold and turns it into a powerbomb. He also kicks Junji really hard in the face. They clip to Junji doing the World's Best Brian Lee Multiple

non-AWA elbow smashes. Then Hijikata does a big kick to the face. Then they clip to the submission.

Takeshi Ono vs. Osamu Tachihikari:

YEAH DADDY! I can honestly say that this match is actually GOOD in a GOOD MATCH kinda way. Not in the far more fun to write about "Osamu Tachihikari Is Red Sovine Of Pro Wrestling" kinda way. It's like they made this Osamu Tachihikari Robot and programmed it to wrestle a quality match. The jovial pie-shaped grin lets you know that that he is flesh and blood and not some automaton created by Yoshiaki Yatsu in the SPWF laboratory in the haunted hills of Hungary.

A direct quote to Phil Schneider: "DID YOU WATCH THIS MOTHERFUCKING MATCH?!? IT'S GOOD!"

PS: Fuck no, I've been burned on your Tachihikari matches before.

DR:I'm serious...

PS: I don't remember where I put the tape...

Either way, Osamu is in great shape and looks almost agile in this match- as he actually bumps a bunch and is always in position for spots and doesn't look like a Captain D's fryboy wrestling on his break- which he is wont to do. Takeshi Ono still has the Tonpachi Machine guns outfit as he hits the ring- eventhough he has luckily left the Tonpachi Machine Guns Shitty Match output at the ringsteps a while ago. They start circling circling circling, Osamu lets loose a comical Real Shooter Really! Kick and they go to a Knucklelock Test of Strength that the Jockeyesque Ono loses miserably. They try it again and Ono grabs Osamu's hand with both hands and hits a Judo throw and Osamu is on the apron, is dropkicked off and is then Plancha-ed by the diminutive Ono. Osamu gets in the ring to be greeted by three punches and a knee, counters by hitting an actually really nice clubbing forearm and hits a swanky old school body slam. He was trained by fucking TENRYU, he has to remember something. A lariat and half-assed sleeper hold later and Ono is all about the Judo throws- as he counters out of a Nodowa attempt. A NASTY looking dropkick to the stomach by Ono and it's time for Ono to hit one of his tricked-out submissions as he does a sort of sideways Tarantula. They send each other into the corner, with Osamu missing the Avalanche and catching a roundhouse to the face and then a corner leg lariat by Takeshi. Osamu counters out of a headlock with fabulous Side Suplex and hits the Nodawa and the Avalanche and then a toprope Ace Crusher. Ono fights out of a Powerbomb, ducks a Lariat and sinks in a really nice Octopus Hold until Osamu makes the ropes. Ono starts wailing away on Osamu before he can get up until Osamu musters a headbutt. Osamu misses another Lariat and catches a Urican- and then LEANS WAYYYY INTO a roundhouse to the face. Osamu stuns Ono with a punch to the face of his own to stave off a flurry of Ono's and then crushes Ono with a Lariat and gets the Buzzkiller for the win. There you go. The best match of Osamu Tachihikari's career. It begins to make him a poorman's Yusuda, which is not a bad fate at all. YOU WANT ALL THIS (if you are a freak like me.)

Urban Ken vs. Daijiro Matsui:

Urban Ken has really funny hair- like he is a teenager trying to dress up for Punk Rock Day during Spirit Week, He kinda fashions a mohawk out of mousse, looking all the world like a chromatically stunted tribute to rht Red Rooster. I will now run a Google search for Daijiro Matsui, since I have never seen him. Hold on. Oh, Schneider was right, he's a PRIDE guy. So I guess he is going to beat the life out of our boy, Urban Ken. Lemme watch. Hold on. Ken is punky as usual, starting off with the Spear and the headbutt. Then. Matsui starts beating the life out of young safety-hawked Urban Ken. Ken is actually kinda advanced for such a youngster- as you can see him keying Matsui as to where to strike next as he guides him along the match. Matsui hits a super neato dropkick and gets the Waikikigatammy and begins immediately to talk shit to Hidaka. I'm assuming that Matsui will work on his Pro Style stuff in BAT-BAT and then head straight to All Japan as that seems to be the pipeline these days for legit shooters who wanna go the Pro wrestling route. Eh. All the punching and kicking without the guiding light of US Pro Style that makes BAT-BAT the most superior style on Earth when done right.

Takuma Sano vs. TigerMask IV:

Sano is the male version of Devil Masami this year. Actually, that's wrong. I never liked Masami's matches until this year in GAEA, I would have probably liked Sano's matches in whatever promotion he's been wrestling in before surfacing in BattlARTS last year. TM4 has been in the zone for a few years now- as he is about as complete a Junior Heavyweight as you will find. He is GREAT on the mat, hits like a motherfucker, is a pretty breathtaking highflyer, can sell, is really graceful- he's almost perfect. So yeah, this match should motherfucking rule it. TM4 enters with the fly ass white fuzzy sleeve tigerskin satin jacket, drops the coat and drops the conservatively be-T-shirted Sano with a dropkick and then crushes his chimplike elder with a fabulous tope- leading straight up to the back stomping. Sano reverses it quickly and makes with La Tapitia or a Mexican Cieling Hold (if you want to use the really great Scott Hudson Global terminology. And who wouldn't?). Sano then continues to scoff at his shootstyle roots by heading straight to the Romero Special (or the Russian Sicle if you want to use an obscure Boris Malenko reference, and who wouldn't?) TM4 escapes, stomps the Sano hammies and goes for the kneebar. Sano powers out of trouble and slowly turns it into a Figure Four that TM4 counters by GETTING TO A VERTICAL BASE WHILE IN THE HOLD! Whomp Ass! Sano switches to an armbar with some twists. TM4 counters by flying up the ropes to hit a Reverse Cross Body Block. Sano repeats the move but instead somersaults over TM4 to set up FAT ASS roundhouse kick to the jaw that rules the motherfucking world. Sano hits the dropkick to set up the baseball slide to set up the Piscada- as Sano hits another dropkick off the toprope to make you forget his UWF stuff and then he hits the fucking SWANK Double Underhook Released Suplex to remind you that he was in the original UWF. TM4 escapes the German and hits the Sayama spin kick to BREADBASKET~! which leads to a Tombstone to set up going straight into a missed moonsault that TM4 foresees and lands on his feet. Sano kicks TM4 in the head and they edit to the corner for the NICE released Superplex. Sano sinks in the Cross Armbreaker and TM4 sells it like it's 1996 New Japan (as if it were a chinlock) and they edit to the Sano spin kick to the back of TM4's head. TM4 punches Sano dead in the face and hits his first Tiger Suplex of the match and the love is flowing freely at this point. TM4 hits the very fine Missile Dropkick but Sano reverses out of a Tiger Suplex. Sano attempts to do a Black Cat

Front DDT but TM4 rolls out of it into a pinning predicament for the win. Edited for some reason. Not the best match for either this year but it is a good little match. One would hope for a bigger type of match out of these two at this point, but it is still a good little match- so I'll quit whining.

Naoyuki Taira vs. Katsumi Usuda:

God, I'm so starting to adore Naoyuki Taira. Where is he from originally? Hold on, I'll do a Google search. Okay, he's a jujitsu instructor in Japan and that's about all I could find other than the fact he beat Maurice Travis in the 1995 Brazil Open. I'm scared of this match going in, since Taira is so new to Pro Style and Usuda is so limited, it would seem. Taira will kick you really quickly right in the face but they hit the mat soon enough with it not being very good early on as they never convey the shootastic matwork that the style demands- and it kinda gets sloppy and turns into half-assed fumbling on the mat until Usuda finally latches on a Keylock. Taira reverses out and swirls nicely into a kneebar for an early ropebreak to set up the FIRST EDIT to the Usuda Front Naked Choke- as Taira does the really great Side Mount into a BodyTwisting Ankle Pick and IT'S FUN FUN FUN!! It gets a little sloppy after that point as they make really obvious openings and kinda wallow around on the mat until Taira locks in a Cross Armbreaker for the Ropebreak/Edit. During the CAB, Taira is GREAT sticking his tongue out like a lizard constricting it's prey. Anyway, post-edit, they start with the Usuda Front Chancellory which leads to Taira escaping and kicking the holy fuck out of Usuda for the eight count. Taira crushes Usuda's head again with a kick and hits the THE MOTHERFUCKING GORGEOUS Released German Suplex for the two count. Taira goes for a second but Usuda fights out but Taira procures an armbar but throws Usuda a curve landing a thundering spinkick to Usuda's innocent and long-suffering testicles. After hitting an elaborate roll-up that Dr. Cerebro would have been proud to call his own for two, they edit to Usuda fighting off an attack and thus begins Usuda beating the living fuck out of Taira for an eight count. Taira's skull is crushed by Usuda's head in mid Capture Suplex, so Usuda hits a Dragon for two in it's stead. After a big batch of editing and reversals, Usuda sinks in the Buzzkilling Wacky guy Tammy and we call it a good little defense of the FMW Independent belt. FAR FAR better than I thought it would be. There is the two rambling crappy segments on the mat, but the fireworks at the end and cool ass counter wrestling more than made up for it. Good Good Good. Editing Bad Bad Bad.

Mohammed Yone vs. Mitsuya Nagai:

These two are really limited- with Yone always hovering around ungood at all points in his career. Nagai kicks harder than any human on earth but isn't a really good worker or anything, so imagine my trepidation. Nagai was in RINGS. No Google search. They do the New Japan Test Of Lariats but with kicks to the hamstrings. Nagai has hamstrings that make Earl Campbell say, "Durn, those are some fat ass hamstrings"- so Nagia wins that and starts teeing off on young Mohammed. Nagai does the "Bring it, bitch" wiggly finger motions and Yone throws him to the floor and body slams him quite gently on the mats around the ring. In a fantastic move, Yone does his stupid running around building kick to the face spot but Nagai nails him in the chest with a kick. Yone reverses a whip into the rail and Nagai bumps like a freak, taking a knee to the teeth that sends him onto his head in the front row. Editing decides to switch to Yone twisting Nagai's head after Yone hits a really nice Running Axe Bomber~! A head scissors later

and the compelling matwork was all used up in the last match. Nagai does make pig noses with Yone's face while Nagai has him in the Camel Clutch until the editing says, "Let's see'em kick each other a bunch." Somehow the kicks by frickin Nagai become listless and ponderous when Yone is selling them and Nagai latches on the most Eudy-level intensity kneebar. Hey guys, it's motherfucking BattlARTS, a kneebar is a submission not a resthold. Edit to more kicking. Nagai stands on Yone's knee and then does some kneedrops on the knee to set up another kneebar for a quick ropebreak. Yone does sell the damage pretty well for a second until he starts sprinting across the ring to hit a Lariat, which wouldn't be that bad, but he misses two before he hits it. He then does the second rope guillotine and a corner Crescent Kick which kinda negates the attempt to sell all the damage. Then Yone hits the Muscle Buster. Nagai kinda randomly sells it as he rolls into a kneebar. They edit to more kicking. Nagai kicks him a couple times, Yone fights out of a Powerbomb, hits a Lariat, misses another, Nagai hits a Released German and a Powerbomb, cinches in a kneebar and we can all thank God that it's finally over. They should have used all the editing urges in the Tiara/Usuda match and liberally exercised in this. This was about like I figured it would be. I was figuring it would be a lil gamey. Yep. Gamey.

Alexander Otsuka vs. Giant Ochiai:

Giant Ochiai is someone I've only seen in programs that Tim Noel brings back from his trips to Japan and Google sez Loser at PRIDE 10 to Ricco Rodriguez in 7 minutes. He's got a giant afro and in the prematch PROMO~! he is wearing these sunglasses that make him look eerily like Buzz the Singer for the Melvins. If you are going to suck at least have the weird loose wiggly skin on your stomach- like a random WAR heavyweight in the post-Subway Diet phase. It's really hypnotic. But he should donate that wiggly skin to burn victims. It will make you even prouder of your successful weightloss plan. I know I'm donating all mine as soon as I can quit eating these seductive Krispy Kreme donuts that tempt me at every motherfucking turn. Ochiachi and Otsuka have a funny match but not really funny hahah. Otsuka will always sell way too much for his own good. Are they pushing this Ochiai guy or something? I mean he's got great hair and he's good with the Judo throws and what have you, but so do half of the anonymous IWA Japan heavyweights. I guess the PRIDE legit shooter thing will get him the Meng push from Taskmaster Ishikawa Sullivan. Otsuka, being really great, makes it a watchable match by going completely Pro Style of lumpy shooter boy number two. (Remember that Osamu Tachihikari threw a fight at a PRIDE to make Gary Goodrich look good once.) After the Pro Style, there is lots of crappy wallowing around as Giant tries to latch onto something. He does finally procure a neat side choke. Diet Butcher counters with a cool Double Triangle Hold. It then goes Lucha Libre AAA 16 year old highspot cavalcade as OA dropkicks Ochiai off the apron and hits a TOPE TOPE TOPE! Ochiai crawls back in the ring and does a bunch of Sumo slaps and an Avalanche and then does two REALLY fabulous Dangerous Backdrops. A terciary Triangle hold by Ochiai and it's back to the Pro Style as Otsuka uses a dropkick, a Rolling Elbow and FUCKING AWESOME Deadlift German Suplex to make his final comeback. OA's RW LUV comes to the surface with a Toprope Flying Shoulder Tackle and OA hits a deep Boston Crab for the win. HOLD THE FUCK ON. This match got really good by the end. Alexander Otsuka is a GOD. Ochiai has the capability of being the Ontological Argument for the Existence of Yoshie (Better FUCTUP Hair, Better Suplexes.)

Yuki Ishikawa vs. Kazunari Murakami:

This is my favorite current male feud in the world. The beatings, the teethbusting, the hate, the anger, the sneers, the hate, and the hate. We, as wrestling fans, cup runneth over. Murakami is UFO (no Google Search Needed.) Ishikawa is a Fujiwara disciple and the toughest motherfucker on earth. Murakami sneers at Ishikawa for the first two minutes and it is fucking BOSS. Murakami starts beating the dogshit out of Ishikawa and Yuki grabs an ankle lock to try to put some form in the maelstrom. It is repeated a few times- as Murakami bludgeons Ishikawa a few seconds and Yuki wrestles his way out. It's basically a variation on the Ikeda/Ishikawa classics except that it's far more superficial and more full-frontal ass-beating in this. It lacks the craft of those matches but it definitely doesn't shirk the stiffness. Yuki supplies the match side and takes the whole beating like a man and the beating is as HARROWING as all their other matches. The brawling through the crowd is fun and filled with hate as Murakami kicks Ishikawa to the ground and steps on his face as he goes back to the ring. It's also really short but I can't imagine it going any longer. You REALLY need to see this.

~!~

\$%\$%\$%\$%\$ EMLL PPV (3/20/01 – Arena Mexico)
by Phil Schneider

Tzuki/Ultimo Dragoncito vs. Pierothcito/Fierocito

Fun match, as I really like lucha midget wrestling. Call me a freak, but I love little tiny guys doing some wrestling. Tzuki, who used to be Mascarita Sagrada and Max Mini, is just tiny as the other midgets dwarf him. He is scary fast though and he opens up with some lil' amateur rides on Fierocito - nothing I love more than midgets taking it to the mat. Unfortunately this match didn't have much matwork, as the majority of the time in between highspots was taken up with tiny rudo brawling. Pierothcito wrestles a lot like a tiny Pierroth, which is perfectly appropriate, but not conducive to making a wrestling match enjoyable. Dragoncito and Tzuki are pretty amazing though and the spots they hit are out of control including: a tope-con-hilo 2 inches from the ringpost by Ultimo, an assisted tope con hilo by Dragon and some freaked out headscissors and armdrags by Tzuki. Not the best mini's match I have ever seen, but definitely a fun opener.

Rencor Latino/Veneno/Arkangel vs. Astro Rey, Jr./Pantera/Felino

This was basically a sprint with five very talented workers (and Veneno) hitting a bunch of really crisp and big time spots. I am starting to really enjoy Pantera's work as he has been sort of an overlooked luchadore, but he is so smooth and can really be spectacular. He hits a fucking awesome twisty headscissors and a bunch of other really neat moves. Rencor Latino was really good in this too, although he wasn't the lucha suplex machine he has been in the past. Veneno has a nice frogsplash, yes he does. Basically an expanded Nitro Lucha match, as there wasn't any matwork but it was super fun.

Dr. Wagner, Jr./Scorpio Jr./Apollo Dantes vs. Brazo De Plata/Negro Casas/Atlantis

This was a basic EMLL main event trios match, nothing special really, a lot of Brazo comedy spots and chops. For such a talented worker Wagner Jr. isn't afraid to dog it. It would be hard to call this match bad and it wasn't a Monterey level sleepwalk job, but it is the kind of thing you forget about two minutes after watching it. I think I enjoyed Casas' work the best, because he is the rare luchadore who works stiff and in a match with a lot of brawling it is nice to have the strikes look like they hurt a bit.

El Signo/Blue Panther/Fuerza Guerrera vs. Safari/Olimpico/Mr. Niebla

This match is basically exhibit #1 in my markdom of Blue Panther. He is just so awesome in this match - the opening mat section with Olimpico is just breathtakingly beautiful and graceful. Basically except for one bump on a in-ring to floor rana, he puts on a perfect performance, counter wrestling, smooth bumping on armdrags and headscissors, just really controlling the flow of the match and delivering on all cylinders. He even breaks out the plancha to the floor. El Signo was pretty great for a wrestler in his late 40's, he did some really nice matwork with Niebla, who really rebounded from his subpar performance at the August PPV. Fuerza was his usual bastard self, and he made the average Safari look really great when they were in there together. The third fall was wild, with lots of dives by everyone, but I really was into the opening mat stuff the most. I would love to see Panther and Olimpico go at it in a singles match. This was better than any match on Wrestlemania and it wasn't even the best match on the card.

Ultimo Guerrero/Tarzan Boy/Rey Bucanaro vs. Shocker/Black Warrior/Satanico

As a rule lucha libre brawls suck, they are usually excuses for wrestlers to dog it, and are usually just loose, rambling and boring. This however was an incredibly heated brawl with every move being hit stiff and brutal, intensity and hatred being displayed, plus there was a ton of high end wrestling in between the ass kicking. I have been very hard on Shocker recently, he has been Shinzakiesque in his laziness, however is fucking off the hook in this match. He and Ultimo Guerrero just beat the shit out of each other, getting all All Japan with Shocker pasting UG with Misawa elbows. Shocker also hits the greatest German suplex in the history of Lucha (which doesn't say much but it was really great.) The main rivalry was Satanico vs. Tarzan Boy and they do a great job telling the story of the young up and comer trying to displace the legend, they chop the shit out of each other, work some very nice mat sequences and have a great series of near falls. Satanico is over 50 but is just awesome here, he is easily the best 50+ worker in the world and was just feeling it here including hitting a senton off the apron, and working at a crazy pace. Black Warrior is a spot machine for the most part, but he breaks out the spots here with the assisted over the ringpost tope of death and the super-rana. Rey Bucanaro was busted up, so he didn't do much, although he did take a crazy bump. The end is just wild with Satanico and Tarzan Boy in the ring exchange near falls, while the other four are on the outside just pummeling each other. Shocker and Ultimo Guerrero are on the floor just pasting each other, while Tarzan attempts to put away Satanico. Just awesome stuff. This might be my 2001 match of the year.

Perro Aguayo vs. Universo 2000 – Mask vs. Hair

This match is mask vs. hair and is billed as Perro's last match in Arena Mexico. This match should have been the absolute diarrhea sprays, however they do the full on Pat Patterson

booking and both guys give it there all, and it turns into an actual watchable match. Perro can barely walk his knees are so bad, but he actually breaks out a tope, although he looked like an old man falling out of bed, the effort was there. Universo deserves some credit too. His brothers are such festering piles of ostrich crap, that his general decentness as a work is often overlooked. He certainly carried a crippled mediocrity like Perro in this match. I mean they did have evil refs, multiple run-ins, et al, but the match never bored me. The end had absolutely insane heat, with Perro getting his head shaved in front his fans. Lawler v. Idol heat.

Well, this PPV totally smoked Wrestlemania, which was a couple of days later. Two legitimate Lucha MOTY candidates, and nothing really bad, even a match that should have been.

~!~

***** New England Championship Wrestling - "Big Slam on Campus" (3/23/01 - Randolph, VT)
by Phil Rippa

Dan continues to hook me up with the shows so I grabbed the one that I hadn't really watched yet (Hey Dan – you are going to soooooo regret some of the tapes I sent you) and since it was devoid of the midget wrestling, I figured I would review it. I also like the indy wrestling so I had problems going through this tape. This is straight from the Vermont Technical College - another place I would not have gotten into. Good old AU. They will accept anyone - Goldie Hahn. Willard Scott. Schneider. Me.

Mike Studd vs. John Walters

This is somewhat perfectly acceptable professional wrestling between two guys who seem to be wrestling their 4th match. Never a good sign though when you blow an Irish Whip. The big problem with the match is that both guys have these moves that seem to be the moves that seem to be the keystone of their moveset - Studd likes to make everything a Tilt-A-Whirl something or other while Walters likes the head scissor takeover. The problem is that neither man seems to know how to properly do the move. Studd fails at three different attempts to do the Tilt-A-Whirl backbreaker (which included the big no no of repeating a spot). Walters didn't seem like he was really sure how far he was supposed to rotate or how he was supposed to land so his takeovers looked awkward and were released too early. If I was going to feature particular moves out of my repertoire, I would make damn sure I knew how to do them perfectly before I ever stepped into the ring. Both fellows were willing to sell and bump so it wasn't as if this match was a complete waste. The crowd was into this thing way more than they should have been but I will never discourage a crowd from being into the wrestling.

Robbie Ellis vs. Tim Fury

They blow the mothballs of the 381 year-old Ellis while Fury has the pants that say, "I am going to kick the hell out of my grandpa". Sadly, that is not to be. I think the NECW website said that Ellis was only like 49 or something but I say he ain't a day over 70. Still for an advanced age, he can still do things in the ring as opposed to say, the Iron Sheik, the man who wins any Battle

Royal by default because he can't take the over the top rope bump anymore. Fuck, Ellis even does a Superfly Splash. No beef with him.

Slykk Wagner Brown and Maverick Wild have issues over some titles including dragging poor Sheldon down to ringside to make some title matches. Bob Evans complains. I hate the interview segments.

Kurt Adonis vs. Mercedes Martinez

Factors that will assure that I will not review this: 1) Man vs. Woman 2) Joel Gertner. I will give lots of credit to Martinez who looks like she could have a bright future if she continues to make wrestling the #1 priority and doesn't fall into the Silicon Valley of the WWF.

Zaquary Springate III vs. Rick Fuller

God, I really hate the "Everyone cuts a promo" trend that has been seeping its way into the Indy scene. But, the WWF does it so that means we have to. Right? RIGHT??? Fuller looks a little confused, possibly because he is perplexed as to why he isn't wrestling Bobby Blayze in front of a Disney crowd. Oh that's right - FUCK YOU VINCE RUSSO! FUCK YOU ERIC BISCHOFF! I also like how Fuller isn't used as the main draw of the card - you know like how some feds will celebrate that they have Headbanger Thrasher in the Main Event. Springate still hasn't done anything to impress me in the matches I have seen. He does the snob gimmick a little too well as he wrestles just like Hunter Hearst Helmsley in 1997. Good to see that Fuller hasn't fallen off the face of the Earth.

My hatred of the "Everybody gets to chat on the stick" hits its pinnacle when Killer Kolowski gets to pontificate on those times when he used to have little blurbs printed in The Wrestler.

Johnny Idol/Mike Steele vs. Fred Curry, Jr./Alex Arion

This would be like watching a Danny Doring/Danny Doring vs. Chris Chetti/Someone less annoying and better than Nova. This was just like the plethora of tags and three ways that Heyman used to role out to open the cards - heavy on the spots, light on the wrestling. The irony is that it seems that these four guys DO wrestle each other on like every card. The upshot is that I would rather watch these guys than anything that was churned out in the last couple of months of ECW. Arion takes a couple of really big bumps and generally looks like the best of the talent in the ring. Idol seems to get lost on more than one occasion with his bail out being his friend, mother, and secret lover, the chinlock. There is a painful sequence where Idol and Arion doing what appears to be more of a Virginia Reel than a hip toss. Steele was kinda there as he mugged for the crowd and threw some punches. Curry really ain't good. I tolerated his dropkicks and strikes but after the forearms that showed more daylight than the Vernal Equinox, I gave up hope. I don't care who his daddy was.

"Brutal" Bob Evans vs. Tarzan Taylor

I wasn't expecting much out of this match - mainly because for a guy using a Tarzan gimmick, Taylor was not wrestling barefoot nor was he one hairy mofo. I was less than enthused with Evans' performance in the other matches I have seen but he really kicked it into gear in this

one. He wasn't afraid to sell perfectly, including this tease of taking a bump into the crowd. Evans has the amazingly basic offense that is a throw back to a simpler time in wrestling. It is the same reason while I really started to dig people like C.W. Anderson. Taylor was putting me to sleep with his performance until he took this wicked reverse suplex from the top rope to the floor, which looked like it legit crippled him for life. Of course, Evans immediately goes to work on the knee and the match is going along fine, until Taylor completely forgets to sell the knee. Bye-bye goodwill. I think I heard something that Evans was one of the guys training people up in NECW. If he isn't, he should be, as I would much prefer people know the proper way to sell and drop an elbow than know how to do a slingshot legdrop or take an unprotected chairshot.

Slykk Wagner Brown vs. Maverick Wild

Golly, does Wild look like someone who would try to get you to buy the complete set of Scarlet O'Hara figurines. This match had some of the most solid wrestling of the evening. Wild (and why he doesn't spell it with an E at the end is beyond me. I guess he figures that if he miraculously makes the WWF he is going to have to change the I to a Y so he might as well change it all in one fell swoop) really really really annoys me with his super sugary baby face routine but he shows some serious promise in the ring. Early on he does this nifty Russian Leg Sweep sequence that I freaked out over. Brown has really grown into his role as a heel - I would say he might be the World's Best Stevie Ray... wait, does that sound like a compliment? I am really impressed by the fact that he has started to pick up on the little things that will make him a good heel. Fuck. He even points to his head after one move so this earns a full worldwide point. There are a couple of huge flaws in this match: 1) Brown clips Wild's knee and then works it over for a good five minutes - most of it spent in a figure four. Wild doesn't sell the leg at all until after the match is over. 2) Bob Evans comes in to cause a DQ finish as he is still pissed at being left out of the Main Event. Crappy ending to a perfectly good match. I really hate Sports Entertainment.

~!~

@!@!@!@!@! UPW Proving Ground 12/20/00
by Phil Schneider

Under Pressure vs. "Super Bad" Brian Taylor

Under Pressure looks kind of like a shrunken Bad New Allen, and looked like he could wrestle a little bit. Super Bad looks like a failed Making the Band contestant, and wrestles like one of the Road Rules kids who got trained by the Headbangers. Stinky, stinky punches, the worst clothesline I have ever seen and a stumbling tackle round out the package. They have a ref bump so Taylor can "keep his heat" before Under Pressure goes over with some sort of undangerous Emerald Frozen. Under Pressure might be watchable in other circumstances. Taylor needs to study harder in class.

"Funky" Billy Kim vs. "Cruiser" Eddie Williams vs. "El Cubanito" Ricky Reyes

The announcer called this the opener, so I guess Pressure vs. Taylor was some sort of televised streamed dark match. Sort of basic junior heavyweight three way for Reyes title. I really don't

like this style of match as it is rarely as good as a straight singles match and is more difficult to pace correctly. These three did a good job though, as there weren't any glaring fuck-ups. They did do some neat stuff including Reyes hitting a Northern Lights Suplex on Kim and Williams kicking him in the nuts when he was bridging and Kim hitting a great Orihara moonsault on both guys. Out of the three Williams impressed me the most, as he seemed to have a decent bastard heel persona and his work was pretty stiff. Kim had some neat highspots but needs to work on his punches (I think I am just going to control C, "needs to work on his punches" so I don't have to type it 47 times). Reyes seemed sort of bland in this match and didn't show me much. Nothing worldbeating but a perfectly fine little match.

Alcatraz/Bad Boy Basil vs. "Outlaw" Mike Knox

This starts as a handicap match with Definition of Pain (Basil and Alcatraz) apparently took out Knox's partner. DOP are dressed in prison gear and are accompanied by Rio Storm who is a Chyna/Asyaish female HGH freak. DOP are your basic big stiffes although Alcatraz is agile in a Bull Buchanan kind of way (walks the ropes, does a slingshot shoulder block). Basil is very Gary Wolfish, and they blow their finisher twice. Knox is a generic cowboy wrestler with whip, black cowboy hat and cowgirl valet, although he did hit a nice headscissors for such a big guy. Handicap portion is basic big guy wrestling, lots of forearm shots and crap. Samoa Joe (who was banned by Rick Bassman, who is doing version 372 of evil fed owner shtick) comes in to help out Knox. Joe is kind of a fun worker and he does some nice spots, before doing the heel turn and attacking Knox.

"Miracle" Mikey Henderson vs. Juventud Guerrera

Very nicely worked WCW Thunderish junior heavyweight match. They start with some really sweet matwork, which was the personal highlight of the match. Nothing spectacular but everything that was hit was done very professional and smooth. Ending came as Henderson flipped out of the Juvi driver attempt and hit a Air Raid Crush for two, picked him up for another and got the pin. Guerrera looked great as usual, and Henderson looked good too, although he didn't do anything spectacular. Fun match although, at about six or so minutes, needed to be longer to really blow the roof off.

"Real Deal" Damien Steele vs. Staz

Me and Rippa had a big long phone conversation (in lue of doing actual work) about whether Real Deal Damien Steele was the same guy who managed the Headhunters in ECW, I said that I didn't think so, cause this guy was a gassed up guy with hair extensions, while the ECW guy was a fat guy with a beard, then Rippa remembered that the ECW guys name was Damien Kane, and I had to go back to watching this match. It wasn't very good, no it wasn't. Staz is doing a Russian Nightmare gimmick although he is a babyface so he does the sickle and the Russian leg sweep, he is better then Nikita but not as good as Kostia Korchenko.

Mike Modest vs. Tony Jones vs. "The Future" Frankie Kazarian

This match started out as a Modest vs. Kazarian singles match, which I was jacked about, because Modest is one of the best wrestlers in the world, and Kazarian is a guy with a bit of a rep as a good worker so a singles match should have easily stolen the show. However Jones

comes out and they changed it to a three way of diminishing expectations. The whole match consisted of Jones and Modest beating on Kazarian and teasing dissention until Kazarian gets a fluke roll up for the win. The match was also hurt by the fact that Modest took his Ray Stevens' bump and broke the ring, so they had to work around that. A real waste of three good workers, and a big example of why I hate three ways.

High Impact (Prodigy/Andy Van Dam) vs. PHAT (Erin Matlock/Devin Willis) vs. Los Latinos Locos (B-Boy/"Gonzo" Mike Gonzalez)

This was a three-way ladder match and was basically you typical indy spotfest. Lots of bumps and backflips in the place of wrestling. Some cool double team spots by PHAT and Andy Van Dam (who is like 5'3 and should be working a Rob Van Damcito in AAA) is already better then his brother, but it is pretty hard to stand out in this kind of match, as the whole ladder match gimmick is getting sort of trite. I enjoyed it more then some of the muscle boy stuff, but you have to bring more then highspots to the table in the 21st. The end was pretty swanky as Prodigy (who is 16 years old) does a shooting star press off the ladder for the win.

Navajo Warrior vs. Smooth Billy D

I actually really enjoyed Navajo Warrior in this match, he had really stiff chops (which you have to bring if you are doing an Indian gimmick) and did some very nice old schoolish work on Smooth Billy D's leg. Smooth was doing a disco dancing minstrel gimmick, complete with Afro wig (which he placed on as part of his babyface comeback, i.e Embry dropping the strap) and was basically worthless but Navajo still made the match watchable. The end came with Keiji Sakota (who was at ringside as part of Schwag's army) spraying mist in Silver's (or possibly Gold's) eyes distracting Smooth, and allowing Warrior to put on the figure four. Far from a good match, but I appreciated the Warrior's simple work a lot more then all the fancy shit in the previous match.

"Funboy" Donovan Morgan vs. Keiji Sakota

Morgan comes out a cuts a promo on Sakota misting the ladies, and threatens to put the blast on the dozen or so valet/strippers in the UPW locker room. Morgan is a great worker and he carries the greenish Sakota to a good little match. Sakota is a big muscular Japanese guy who I could see going abroad and being big in New Japan. He does a lot of elbows and lariats, but Morgan provides the wrestling, including the top rope rana into a powerbomb spot Morgan used in his match against SD2K in APW, and some very smooth standing counters. End comes with the 1980's Prime Time Wrestling finish with Schwag holding Morgan and Sakota hitting him and Morgan rolling him up. Sakota destroys him after the match. The finishes on this show are pretty archaic its like Lord Alfred Hayes is booking.

Prototype vs. Chase Tatum

I was a bit of a Chase Tatum mark during his days as a WCWSN standout. I thought he had as big of an upside as Goldberg, he was hugely muscled and could pull off those shootstyle approximations. This was the battle of the Meltzer pin up boys, wasn't good wrestling or anything but it was better then say Warlord vs. Chris Walker which would be the 1980's physique approximation. It looks like these workers realize that just having a place in Jeremy

Soria's nighttime fantasies is not enough to get to the big time in the 21st century. Prototype does some decent Doug Furnasy leap spots, (leapfrog, standing drop kick) to show off his quads, Tatum throws some decent suplexes including a great released German. This would probably get the full worldwide point, which is more than I was expecting. Tatum really should be working New Japan as he is way better than Sledgehammer or some of the other load gaijin.

"Big Time" Tom Howard vs. "Fallen Angel" Christopher Daniels

Real fun match, with Tom Howard showing way more than he ever did as KGB. Some nice highspots that hit really well (especially a great missile dropkick), good solid punches and nice counter work with Daniels. Chris looked great as always, including one of the nastiest Enzugiri's I have ever seen, just pasting Howard. Then end comes with a series of reversals into the last rites, which was nice although not as smooth as I have seen him do with others. Howard is more of a U.S. Heavyweight worker, and the quick junior stuff didn't look as crisp. Howard v. Mike Modest would be really good. Match was too short, like every other match on this card, as it could have used another five minutes or so. A masked Ninja runs in after the match and kills Daniels with a chairshot, he throws the mask off to reveal Samoa Joe, and then hits an Emerald Frozen on a chair, busting Daniels open. Neat little angle to set up next month's main event, and one of the only angle things all night that worked for me.

Ballard Brothers/Lexi Fife vs. Hardy Boyz/Lita

This was a good standard tag team match, the Ballards are really talented rudos and they broke out some sweet double teams including a double swinging cradle and a double face buster. They kept the women out of the match for the most part and worked a straight US style tag match. Matt played Morton, Jeff was house of fire, good standard house show stuff. Not as good as Daniels v. Howard or Juvi v. Henderson, but a solid third.

I enjoyed the show overall, much better than the previous show I saw (California Collision, with pot head Van Dam fucking up a Chris Daniels match.) There were still plenty of problems. All the matches were too short, I don't think anything went 10 minutes, plenty of stuff could have used the extra time as well. Plus every single wrestler had a valet or manager, which completely negated any effect of any of them. Most of the finishes were clean, but still booked archaically (lots of roll ups, and small packages) and two three ways, is two too many. Still it did have some workers I want to see again, and is probably worth a download.

AA

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!There's no turning back now- I'm under attack now- I see the skies are open
And I hear the word spoken- SINGLES GOING STEADY You only perceive
what you believe- You need only believe to believe- What do you know?- What do you know?
+++++

MAKAMI vs. TAKESHI SASAKI- DRAMATIC DREAM TEAM COMMERCIAL TAPE -
12/22/1999: (DEAN!)

(This is a real time review that makes no sense now. I'll try to fill in the blanks. If it becomes ENTIRELY useless as a review, get two things out of this: Katsumi sent it to me because he is simply swell and you need to buy stuff from Japan Wrestling Shop.com and THIS is probably the best match in the history of DDT. From now to the end, everything in parenthesis is not realtime but highly skilled insight in hindsight. Outside the parenthesis was written during the synchronization.)

(Me and Schneider will at times repulse my wife by syncing up on a tape to watch the same match. It's the most dorktastic thing you can possibly do, but it is also like the good old days when Juventud Guerrera and Billy Kidman would wrestle on Nitro and you could have a mutual wrestling experience in two different cities at once.) Circling xcircling, locking locking ARE WE SYNCED UP? Head and neck head and neck. Me and Phil are syncing up. Two men, 120 miles apart; two tapes synched up. Sasaki and Makami reverse out of take down after takedown. Phil's phone sucks and I can't hear what he is saying, His reception is better as Sasaki reverses the headlock into another headlock. "That's what a real wrestler does. This isn't some indie shmoe. (Sasaki) reverses the headlock, kicks out the knee, works out of the headlock. This is a display of Pro Wrestling technique." Makami does a front flip into a legdrop as he reverses into a kneebar. "These guys are matwrestling motherfuckers and we are REALLY synched up" This stays on the mat, with Makami doing the super slick triple ride as Takashi tries to spin out of as chokehold. (That move is fucking awesome because it is a variation on what Black Warrior and El Dandy do on the mat in the 16 Cibernetico Match from 97) Sasaki lays in the kicks and drives Makami onto the floor. Makami with a "Gradycanrana" as Phil relates that Erin O'Grady "FUCK!" Makami crushes Takeshi with a El Hijo Del Santo styled tope. Sasaki kicks hi (The syncing up ended here from a writing standpoint because I was getting to into the match too much to type anymore. Anyway, now in the present, I'm talking to Phil and he has loaned the tape to Phil Rippa so Phil could watch the dying days of Wrestling Power 2001. I realize that I have to finish this review so I tell Phil to grab something at random and I'll write random actual comments and we'll see what happens. What the fuck- here we go.) Eddy is a great actor. I love Jeff Hardy but he dresses gayer than anyone in wrestling. He's like- in the Flock at first, the way Van Hammer dressed. So this will be completely unreadable? No it will be great. Maybe you should review the Shinnigami match like this. Now you are gonna get all self-conscious. Hey! Perry Saturn. Hey, Dean Malenko- I keep forgetting that Dean Malenko is a wrestler. Five good wrestlers and Perry Saturn. If he isn't beating someone's ass his punches really suck, I wish he was always shooting on somebody. Jerry Lynn is tiny. The lildest guy in the world, he's like 6 inches shorter than Jeff Hardy. Who fuckin' short is Jerry Lynn? I love the Johnny Valentine Side headlock Sequence. all they need the ref not seeing Sasaki opulling Makami's trunks. DON'T TAG PERRY SATURN! Dynamite Kid said he's one of the best wrestlers in the world.... Sasaki is just giving him the coolest openings to guide Makami to the next spot. Sasaki is a tiny Yamazaki. Welcome to the mat. What was the first part of the match? Look at Terry's nipples... Fuck, they just said WE WILL STAY ON THE MAT as he drives Makami to mat by his shoulder. Bow and Arrow by Jerry Lynn. Here we go, mat is over now the the assbeating begins. The claw! They didn't do the claw! I know, I'm kidding; the Hardy's did that cool doubleteam powerbomb... Oop back to the arm. Sasaki- I'm trying to figure to out who Sasaki modeled himself after. Hey, Eddy has a new submission,

actually it's kinda crappy- a reverse Figure Four. Is it like Yoshie's? I dunno, I've never seen Yoshie... Fuck, that was 7 and half minutes long. MAIKAMI's got really really great highposts. The beauty of Sasaki is that he set the whole rest of the other match to make the MAKAMI highspots make sense in the context of the match. MAKAMi isn't really selling the damage of the first haldf, so that's a the weakness of Makami. FUCK, MIKAMI leaned into the double boot of Sasaki. Oh fuck yeah, I remember that spot... Is Ron Simmons on the Mic worth a Test/Bradshaw match? Big Show is 7 feet tall and must a have a huge penis and he must (have) used that penis to fuck (Deleted comment about a certain booking committee member's love interest) up the ass because the Big Show is jobbing like fuckin Iron Mike Sharpe. I'm leaving out the part about (read parenthesis above) THIS SHIT IS Gold I tell ya. Hey, MIKAMI threw a discus punch. Like Matt Hardy. OOP! the Key lock, Muy Thai knees to the head. AWESOME! the Murdock Brainbuster (actually, a variation of the Northern Lights Bomb because he drops him in front of him). Hey, we got Chris Benoit and Steve Regal in the same match. Who else is in it? Kurt Angle and ... Rikishi. MIKAMI postmatch mole on his cheek. Sasaki is a sexy motherfucker with the comical facial hair. Well that got kinda long, alright! Yeah cool a ladder match, have they ever HAD those in the WWF before....

(some vestigial random comments from the original synching up):

- He wiggles real good when you break his back
- Yeah it's a great spasms.

Bret Hart vs. Steve Austin – Survivor Series '96 (11/17/96) (Rippa)

This was so typical of the pathetic WWF back in the day – an amazingly crappy card (this one included that oh so savvy decision to put the title on Sid) that had this one gem buried right in the middle of it. (On a “More Things Change The More They Stay The Same Note: Rocky Maivia was the only survivor in his match.) Boy, this is so much better than their Wrestlemania match. I didn't think the Wrestlemania match had aged well while I forgot how great this match was. Now, I am pissed at myself for not rewatching this match before I voted. (God – the WWF ballot seems like it was ages ago. Misty Colored Water Memories...) This was professional wrestling (I promised myself I would not refer to anything in this match as “old school”) at it's simplest and finest. Hart was returning to the WWF after his hissy fit of having to drop the title to Shawn Michaels. Austin had started to emerge into the next great star of the fed and, of course, Hart hated the heelish Austin. The match drips with so much psychology that I can't even describe it all. Hart tries to outwrestle Austin figuring that there is no one who can outwork him. Shocking Hart though, Austin hangs with the Hitman on the wrestling aspect and continuously gains the advantage through basic heel tactics (eye rakes, holding the rope on the abdominal stretch, etc.). There is absolutely beautiful storytelling through the match and it works on a myriad of levels. The best is how Austin starts to work over Hart's throat. Hart is obviously known for his conditioning. Hell, he had wrestled for 60+ minutes in his last match and you figure he has kept himself in shape by wrestling sheep or whatever the hell he would do in Canada.) So Austin, who is in fairly good shape himself, makes a point of shortening Hart's endurance. A Stun Gun, a sleeper, elbows, knees and boots directly to the throat all work over Bret who is gasping for air within the first 10 minutes of the contest. Hart gains little respites of offense in but he continually gets overwhelmed by Austin. Finally, Hart figures out how to get the

best of Austin and that is to start brawling with him. He even starts to lift moves from Austin as he hits a Stun Gun of his own to finally gain control of the match. I should note that Jim Ross is really hit and miss in this match – and the misses solely rest on Vince McMahon's shoulders. McMahon and J.R. do the whole bickering bitter announcer routine that was old before it even started. And Vince, as we all know, is beyond terrible in calling a match, not so much for his "What a Maneuver" act but more because he didn't feed his partner's anything to work with and would often drift onto completely unimportant tangents. So Ross at times tries too hard to compensate for the void that is McMahon. But when J.R. is focused in this match, you remember why he was, at one time, one of the best announcers in the game. Ross had the ability to call the action that would be entertaining to the hardcore wrestling fan yet still educational and informative for the person watching their first PPV - like comparing this match with Hart's previous big matches held in Madison Square Garden (against Mr. Perfect and his two Wrestlemania X matches). Okay dokey, back to the match. Now, the first half of the match was pretty great but there are parts of the second half that are even better. Austin continues to break out every move he learned from the Chris Adams School of Wrestling. The problem he finds out though is that, none of it is enough to put Hart away. He tries his own submission move – the Texas Cloverleaf – but Hart escapes that. He tries the Stunner but makes a questionable call in judgment. The Stunner gets hit right by the ring ropes. Austin takes the time to drag Hart to the middle of the ring so he can't use the ropes to escape. Unfortunately for him, Hart has enough time to get a shoulder up. He does the neat looking Bow-and-Arrow, which Hart reverses into a Sharpshooter – in what should have been a better looking spot. Austin has one last trick left. He goes for the Million Dollar Dream (the move he had been taught by Ted DiBiase during his comically bad Ringmaster days). The tactical error with that idea is that Hart loves people to put him in sleepers because it allows him to push off of the turnbuckle and get the stunning pinfall. Someone didn't watch his Wrestlemania VIII tape. Anyway, this thing went almost 30 minutes and it was really fucking great throughout. I guess some newer fans might not like it because there is no blood, Austin doesn't drink beer, no one dives off a ladder and no one shows their titties but I got no complaints. Plus, the magic of fast forward allows me to watch this match and only this match.

Hulk Hogan vs. Nick Bockwinkel (TONY!)

This is the match where Hogan scores the pin and wins the AWA belt, only to have the decision reversed by the unfathomably geriatric AWA President, Stanley Blackburn, in a pre-Dusty version of the Dusty finish. The booking of this match is far more interesting than the action, which is largely pedestrian brawling that suggests that either Hogan couldn't work at Bockwinkel's level or that Bockwinkel dogged it to make Hogan look as bad as possible. We all know the results of the power struggle, of course: Hogan ended up getting the superman push elsewhere and the AWA withered on the vine, so to speak. That said, it's easy to understand Bockwinkel's frustration. Hogan's whole shtick - the entrance music, the shredding of the shirt, the weakness of the actual wrestling - was a negation of what Bockwinkel stood for as a performer. Whereas Bockwinkel relied on compelling psychology and credible characterization to sell himself and his matches, Hogan relied on the flash gesture, the cultivation of the cheap, empty pop. Whereas Bockwinkel saw wrestling as a game whose purest moments were in its subtlety, in its slow build-up within the framework of credible work, Hogan proved to be the

perfect worker to sell the negation of the 70s style's reliance on matwork with. But even as an advocate of the old style as better than what has come after it, it's hard not to see the desperation in how this match is set up. The cravenness of the finish, the tepidity of the work, and the deflation of the crowd as they realized that the title change they "suspended disbelief" to accept all suggest that Verne opened up a Pandora's Box hiring Hogan to start with, and that wrestling and sports entertainment are fundamentally incompatible, because if people are conditioned to accept a cheap high as being just as good as something more substantive, then they will take what is easy. The easy-credit, easy-lay path of resistance that suggests that people have just given up on life having much meaning. So these two had a crappy match, with a lot of clubbing, and a leg drop. That's not the story of this match, though. The story of this match is the same story as farmhouses being torn down for subdivisions, as achievement and talent not being rewarded even as the buzz for hacks and halfwits grows into a deafening, malevolent monotone. And the people - the money marks in their 3 and 5 and 7 dollar seats - they likewise want the cheap fix, the approximation of quality. Because margarine's just as good as butter, after all, and because catsup is a vegetable. Because it doesn't matter, really, that employers are fickle and build plants to close them down when they get a better deal. Because it doesn't matter, ultimately, that permanence is a lie. Better to embrace the image because it is an image, bright and shiny and authentic as plastic roses. Hulkamania is running, wild.

Eddie Guerrero vs. Terry Funk – 5/20/89 (Schneider)

Terry Funk in the NWA in 1989 may have been the best all around heel run for matches and promos that I can remember. Funk returned to the NWA by piledriving Ric Flair on a table (back when that meant something) injuring his neck and putting him out of action. Funk then went on a rampage on NWA TV, as they put him in the ring with great workers and he had a series of super matches leading up to Flair's return at the Great American Bash. While he was having these matches he was also cutting awesome insane promos, Funk could deliver that combination of insanity and intensity better than almost anyone, outside of possibly ECW Cactus Jack. For this match, a 13-year-old Eddie Guerrero, with his pre-stimulant physique and junior high school mustache, was brought in. But he also comes in with all the wrestling goodness the name Eddie Guerrero guarantees. The match starts with Funk screaming at the ring announcer for introducing him before he could remove his chaps. Funk then attempts to chop Eddie who evades him with forward rolls, Eddie gets a bunch of offense for what is basically a squash, as he hits some nice dropkicks and standing headscissors. Funk hit some really brutal chops and a crazy man giant swing. The end of this match was super fresh with Eddie dropkicking Funk out of the ring and hitting an insane plancha from one ringpost almost all the way to the other, Eddie then goes for a pescada and Funk moves with Guerrero taking a nasty bump. Funk gets into the ring and runs the ropes four or five times, before nailing a baseball slide which flips Eddie over the guardrail in another crazy bump. The Funk delivers a super nasty piledriver on the floor, which bends Eddie's neck at a bad looking angle like the way Flair's neck bent at Wrestle War. Then Funk goes into the crowd, legitimately terrifying a small child. He comes back and cuts a great promo comparing Flair with a Jackass that is old and needs to be shot, and getting on his knees and begging Jim Ross to put him in the Top 10 rating.

NEXT TIME: SWEET LUCHA! MICHINOKU PRO! ALL 7 OF US (MAYBE)! IT WILL BE WACKY!
IT WILL BE WILD!

"Honey, you should have seen me with my last customer, I ... no, but I came so close. This guy was as ... Whose voice is that? Is that Fred? ... Aw, you said it was over ... No, don't put him on -- Hello, Fred, h-hi." - Gil